



North Texas Soccer - Respect Our Referees (ROR) Program

What is the Respect Our Referees program?

The Respect Our Referees (ROR) program is designed to reduce verbal abuse and inappropriate / unacceptable behavior involving soccer referees and to positively influence behavior around the soccer pitch. The goal is to provide a fair, safe and enjoyable environment for everyone involved; players, coaches, spectators and referees.

The North Texas State Soccer Association (NTSSA) publishes Bylaws and Rules which cover everyone involved in our soccer program, and clearly identifies the responsibilities of all parties and the implications of those failing to comply with these rules. The Bylaws and Rules specify the terms "verbal and physical abuse" – but for this Program the term "verbal abuse" relates to language and behavior that demeans and dissents the referees' decisions and their performance on the pitch.

The ROR program is covered by the NTSSA Bylaws and Rules and fully supported by Lindale Soccer Association. The program will also provide tools to enable referees to deal with instances of abuse, and to report them when necessary. These reports will then be handled by NTSSA and its procedures, including the Appeals & Disciplinary (A&D) committee, if required.

Why do we need a Respect Our Referees Program?

Soccer has grown immensely, in our state, in the last 25 years and there are more leagues, teams and players participating every week. More people are watching soccer generally, supporting both semi-professional and professional leagues. This is great news for grassroots, non-professional soccer and helps to grow the US Soccer program.

The state has a well-established recruitment and instruction program which brings in more than 3000 new referees every year. Unfortunately, our referee attrition rate is currently over 50%, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to supply the number of referees that the leagues require. This means that on any given weekend, leagues may not have enough referees to cover matches, and even the most competitive leagues have had to cancel and reschedule matches due to a lack of referees. This affects all levels, leagues, and age groups for both male and female matches. (The problem affects all sports and geographies.)

Soccer is a sport which generates a high level of excitement which leads to loud vocal support and comments. Coaches and spectators need to understand that there are boundaries which cannot be crossed without consequences. The program is not designed to dismiss coaches and abandon matches for acceptable verbal outbursts or simple questioning of a referee's decision.



When asked, the **#1 reason** for referee attrition is “**verbal abuse**” from coaches, spectators, and players. Perhaps, not surprisingly, the largest loss is amongst our **youth referees aged from 12 to 16 years old**. Recent figures from the State Referee Administrator show that from a group of 100 new referees 46 return for a second year, 32 return the third year, and only 16 will return for a fourth year. **An attrition rate of 54% is unacceptable and not sustainable.**

Who does the problem affect?

The declining number of referees means that if recruitment is not maintained AND attrition reduced then leagues will be forced to conduct matches without well trained, impartial referees. This will negatively impact the safety, enjoyment and impartiality which the referee provides. This impacts the players directly.

Player enjoyment of soccer is also negatively impacted by loud verbal abuse and inappropriate / unacceptable behavior by coaches and spectators.

How will the program be implemented?

The ROR program will be rolled out in two ways:

1. **Lindale Soccer Association** is accountable for our teams, coaches, and spectators. Teams and coaches will be informed of the implication of referee abuse carried out by themselves and / or their spectators:

- i. Coaches for each team will be provided with a code of ethics document that they will need to sign and give back to the Lindale Soccer Association.
- ii. Each coach will also have a Parent Code of Conduct document which must be signed and held by the coach for each parent or guardian of a player.

2) **Referees** will be educated on dealing with verbal abuse/ inappropriate / unacceptable behavior from players, coaches, and spectators. The Laws of the Game provide powers in Law 5 for the referee to deal with players and coaches. Referees will be empowered within the Laws of the Game and with the backing of NTSSA to handle verbal abuse / inappropriate / unacceptable behavior by sending off players, dismissing coaches, removal of spectators (using the coaches or marshals), and in extreme cases by abandonment of the match.

Is the Program supported by North Texas Soccer and the affiliated Leagues?

Yes, the Program is fully supported by NTSSA and all affiliated Leagues.



What powers will the Referee have during the match when dealing with dissent / verbal abuse from a Coach?

There is a protocol for dealing with Coach dissent/ verbal abuse / inappropriate / unacceptable behavior which Referees will be instructed to follow:

1. For the first instance of loud, public dissent the Referee will stop the match the next time the ball goes out of play, and politely **ask** the Coach not to yell as it makes it hard to focus on the match.
2. If the problem continues, at the next stoppage the Referee will politely **tell** the Coach that they need to stop their abusive behavior or they will be dismissed.
3. If the problem persists, at the next stoppage the Referee will gather BOTH Coaches and politely **tell** the offending Coach that he / she is being **dismissed for irresponsible behavior** and must leave the area.
4. The Referee needs to make a note of the name of the offending Coach, the time of dismissal, what they said and anything else they said after they were dismissed.
5. If the Coach refuses to leave the area in a timely manner, 2-3 minutes, the match must be abandoned, and the opposing Coach informed.
6. Report the incident to the match assignor and NTSSA by emailing NTXREFEREEABUSE@GMAIL.COM

Referees will also call for help from the Board member On Duty (BOD).

What powers will the Referee have during the match when handling dissent / verbal abuse from Spectators?

When the level of spectator dissent/ verbal abuse / inappropriate behavior becomes unacceptable to the Referee there is a protocol which Referees will be instructed to follow:

1. The Referee will stop the match the next time the ball goes out of play and politely **ask** the Coach to speak to their spectators and ask them to quiet down as their behavior is making it difficult for the Referee to officiate the match effectively.
2. If the problem continues, at the next stoppage the Referee will politely **tell** the Coach that they must intervene to stop the spectator/s abusive behavior, or the spectator/s will need to leave.
3. If the problem continues, at the next stoppage the Referee will politely tell the Coach that they must **remove** the spectator/s, and they must leave the area. The match must not restart until the offending spectator/s leave.
4. The Referee needs to make a note of the time that the spectator/s were asked to leave and what was said after they were asked to leave.
5. If the Coach refuses to remove the spectator/s then the Referee will gather BOTH Coaches and politely **tell** the offending Coach that he / she is being **dismissed for irresponsible behavior** and must leave the area.



6. If the Coach or spectator/s refuse to leave the area in a timely manner, 2-3 minutes, then the match must be abandoned. Inform BOTH Coaches why the match is being abandoned.
7. Report the incident to the match assignor and NTSSA by emailing NTXREFEREEABUSE@GMAIL.COM

Referees will also call for help from the Board member On Duty (BOD).

What will the Referee have to do after the match?

The Referee will write up an incident report indicating the match details, steps taken in the match and specific abusive words or actions used by the coach or spectators.

This will be given to the assignor, field coordinator or League administrator.

An email incident report must also be sent to NTXREFEREEABUSE@GMAIL.COM . This email will automatically be forwarded to the State Referee Committee and to NTSSA so that the incident can be investigated, and appropriate action taken.

NTSSA have specific sanctions which can be applied to Leagues, teams, coaches, and spectators found guilty of referee abuse.

Texas Penal Code 22.01

Committing the crime of assault against a sports participant will result in a Class B misdemeanor which carries a penalty of (1) up to 180 days in prison, (2) up to \$2,000 fine, (3) or both.

The covered official is anyone who participates in an official capacity, including a referee, umpire, and linesman.

In addition, if the referee is an underage minor, this could lead to child abuse charges. Examples of what is considered Child Abuse or Neglect in Texas (Texas Penal Code 22.04) include, but are not limited to:

- Emotional or psychological abuse.
- Failing to remove a child from an emotionally, psychologically, or physically abusive situation.
- Physical injury or threat of substantial harm to the child.
- Failing to make a reasonable effort to prevent the acts of another person resulting in physical injury.

An individual charged with a child abuse offense that involved intentional or knowing actions by the alleged offender that resulted in bodily injury can be convicted of a felony of the third degree. A felony of the third degree is punishable by two to ten years in prison and/or a fine up to \$10,000.



To reiterate, the program is not designed to dismiss coaches and abandon matches for acceptable verbal outbursts or simple questioning of a referee's decision. It is intended to encourage fair, positive play and retain our referees, especially our youth.

WE NEED YOUR HELP

The average age of a referee is 16
They can start as young as 12

We lose 40 - 45% of all newly registered referees
before their first season is over

HELP US KEEP THE YOUNG REFEREES IN THE PROGRAM

- R** - **Respect** the young referee
- E** - **Encourage** them with some praise
- F** - **Forgive** them if they get a call(s) wrong
- E** - **Embolden** them by thanking them
- R** - **Remain** kind if you think a call is incorrect
- E** - **Elevate** them with a positive comment
- E** - **Enjoy** the game

You wouldn't want an adult yelling at your child.

Every referee has attended a referee clinic, passed the test, received their badge and is excited to get started. They will make mistakes and that's OK.

Help us change the negative statistic of 40 - 45% by leaving a positive footprint at every game you watch.

Thank you - North Texas Referees